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PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IS THE ARTHRITIS PAIN RELIEVER

May is Arthritis Prevention Month

(RICHMOND, Va.)—To 1.5 million Virginians, fighting the pain of arthritis is a daily battle. Increasingly, health professionals recognize that moderate physical activity can help ease the pain and increase mobility.

The term arthritis describes more than 100 diseases and conditions that affect joints and surrounding tissue. Among the most common forms of arthritis are osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and fibromyalgia. Osteoarthritis occurs when the cartilage covering the joints breaks down. Rheumatoid arthritis is characterized by swollen, painful and deformed joints. Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition that causes widespread pain in muscles, tendons and other soft tissue.

Research shows that physical activity and weight loss can help people with arthritis reduce the pain, move more easily, feel more energetic and keep muscles, bones and joints healthy. Losing as little as 11 pounds can reduce the risk of knee osteoarthritis by as much as 50 percent.

“Starting moderate physical activity early helps head-off pain that can reduce your activity level,” said Brunilda Caro-Justin, manager of the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) arthritis program. “Most people who stick with a regular exercise program start to feel better in four to six weeks.”

VDH recommends the following physical activity tips to help relieve the pain of arthritis.

- Start slowly: 10-15 minutes at a time. Build up to 30 minutes a day most days of the week.
- Water exercises, especially in a heated pool, benefit almost everyone with arthritis because it puts less stress on your joints and strengthens your entire body.
- Walking helps improve energy and strengthens your heart.
- Ride a bike, indoors or outdoors.
- Combine range-of-motion exercises with aerobics.
- Dancing, gardening and washing the car are good exercises, too.

VDH provides funds, training and technical assistance to local arthritis projects in the Fairfax, Loudoun, Three Rivers and Virginia Beach health districts. Staff members work to increase awareness and education about arthritis and promote the benefits of physical activity and self-management programs for people with arthritis. For more information, visit www.vahealth.org/cdpc/arthritis or www.cdc.gov/arthritis.

EDITOR’S NOTE: For information about the localities served by the health districts listed above, visit <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/LHD/LocalHealthDistricts.asp>.